

## **Taking Care of Wisconsin Caregivers Program Celebrates 10 Years of Support for Family Caregivers**

It's not a new concept. Family members, friends, or neighbors looking out for one another and providing care to those who need help has been going on for centuries. But providing help to the caregiver so that he or she can continue to provide care is a relatively new idea. For the past ten years, the National Family Caregiver Support Program (NFCSP) has provided much-needed services to assist family members who care for grandparents, parents, spouses, and disabled children who cannot care for themselves.

Why the focus on family caregivers? They're the primary source of support for individuals of all ages with physical, mental, and chronic health conditions. According to a National Alliance for Caregiving study, 65 million people nationwide provide care for a clinically ill, disabled, or aged family member or friend each year. Almost all do it without pay, help, or outside resources. And while the job can be extremely rewarding, it can also take a toll on the physical and mental well-being of the caregiver. In Wisconsin, family caregiver support services are available in every county and tribe and are accessible through a website and toll-free phone number that connect people with their local caregiver resources.

“We know that help isn't always easy to find and often caregivers don't live in the same community or even the same state as their loved one,” says Barb Thoni, president of the Wisconsin Association of Area Agencies on Aging, a group that provides support to county and tribal aging programs throughout the state. “These resources allow anyone who is directly caring for or concerned about the well-being of someone 60 and over or someone who is disabled to call a toll-free number – (866) 843-9810 – or go to the website – [wisconsincaregiver.org](http://wisconsincaregiver.org) – and find out where to go in a specific county to find help.” The program also assists grandparents or relative caregivers 55 years of age and older who care for children under age 19, or care for a relative with a disability who is 19 to 59 years of age.

One of the barriers to caregivers getting help is that many don't identify themselves as caregivers. "Family caregiving has been around as long as there have been families," says Thoni. "But many people still don't think of themselves as caregivers who deserve some help. The challenge is to find them and let them know that there is help if they need it."

The kinds of help that caregivers want or need can be diverse. The son of an ailing elder might need to find a personal care attendant to help his father with bathing, eating or taking medications. The husband of a woman with Alzheimer's disease may benefit from the emotional support of a local caregiver support group or from respite (i.e., someone to come and stay with his wife while he takes a break from caregiving). NFCSP is flexible to meet the needs of caregivers. Program specialists provide information and assistance on services such as adult day care, case management, home health and personal care, respite care, financial and legal matters related to caregiving, home delivered meals, transportation and more. In short, they help family caregivers understand their options and find assistance.

With the holidays approaching, caregiving can become a front-burner issue for families who typically visit one another more frequently at this time of year. That makes it a prime time for people to be looking for caregiver resources. "When a caregiver is struggling, it can feel like there is no light at the end of the tunnel," says Thoni. "Finding help can make the journey a little bit brighter. We hope more family caregivers find the help they need."

For more information or to speak with a family caregiving program specialist, contact the Aging and Disability Resource Center of the North at 1-866-663-3607, or visit our web site at <http://adrc-n-wi.org/>